

Playground Safety Fact Sheet

Playgrounds provide important opportunities for children learning to explore their environments, develop skills for play and gain confidence. Yet playgrounds may present unnecessary hazards that could have a devastating impact on a child. Playgrounds are the setting for most of the injuries sustained by children aged 5 to 14 in the school environment. A special study of playground injuries and deaths conducted in 2001 for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission found that each year emergency departments treat more than 200,000 children, ages 14 and younger, for playground-related injuries. Approximately 45% of those injuries are severe. Falls from playground equipment result in a higher proportion of severe injuries than either bicycle or motor vehicle crashes (Phelan, 2001).

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY GOALS: The most critical areas to address are:

- **SURFACE:** Make sure surfaces around playground equipment have at least 12 inches of impact-absorbing material such as wood chips, mulch or safety-tested rubber. Protective ground surfacing should span 6 feet in all directions.
- **MAINTENANCE** Follow manufacturer's instructions and recommended inspection schedule. Make sure spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs, measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- **SUPERVISION** Remove visual barriers, position adults for optimum view, consider rules and policies regarding clothing, restrictions and safe play to be shared with students and parents.
- **SPACING** Children should be able to move safely from one activity to another through proper spacing between equipment and other structures.
- Schools, parents and other organizations (e.g.; town's Parks and Recreation Department) should work collaboratively to address playground improvements utilizing U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Although replacing playground equipment can be costly, not replacing unsafe equipment can be very expensive in terms of liability. One recommendation is to arrange a purchasing and replacement schedule that weighs equipment durability and safety with available funds. School personnel should record playground injuries including the equipment involved. This will allow for assessing equipment or play behavior that is frequently associated with injuries, and develop a system for regular maintenance as well as a plan for equipment repair, replacement and/or removal.

SPECIAL NOTE: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that any new or renovated playground should provide access for children with disabilities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Injury Prevention and Control Program, Bureau of Family & Community Health., Mass. Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108 Phone: 617-624-5413 Fax: 617-624-5075 Website: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/fch/injury>

RESOURCES

Consumer Product Safety Commission, *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*
<http://www.cpsc.gov/SPSCPUB/PUBS/playpubs.html>

National Program for Playground Safety
<http://www.playgroundsafety.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.aap.org/family/playgrd>